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ABSTRACT

This document presents the point of view that although socialism has produced benefits for the USSR, Soviet society has undertaken its own radical reconstruction. History shows that the natural basis of changes in every society tends to be objective technological revolutions. The first technological revolution was agrarian. The second was industrial. The third revolution, the scientific and technological revolution, took place mostly in highly developed capitalist countries. The first aspect of perestroika in Soviet society is dissatisfaction with the state's power and a striving to adopt democratic governing. The second aspect of perestroika is the economy and financing. Economic reconstruction is complicated by the monopoly of central ministries, strict centralization in national economy management and its branches, lack of production material and equipment for free trading at the market, and a financial system in disarray caused by the partial transition to market relations and cooperatives. Reconstruction of the ideology in the Communist Party is also hinted at. The main trends of reforms in education are decentralization of management and differentiation of education. New concepts in vocational training include new curricula and programs and differentiation of subjects regarding professions. One way to reconstruct vocational training is by "de-ideologization" of education, democratic reform, and priority in financing. (YLB)

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Perestroyka in the Soviet Union

Mirza Ismail Makhmoutov

Occasional Paper No. 128

CENTER ON EDUCATION
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THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
1900 KENNY ROAD • COLUMBUS, OHIO 43210

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- approaches to enhancing economic development and job creation.

Occasional Paper No. 128

PERESTROYKA IN THE SOVIET UNION: WHAT IT IS, WHY IT MUST HAPPEN, AND WHAT THE BARRIERS ARE

MIRZA ISMAIL MAKHMOUTOV
Director of the Institute
for Professional Education Research
Kazan Research Institute
Kazan, Russia

Center on Education and Training for Employment
The Ohio State University
1900 Kenny Road
Columbus, Ohio 43210

1990

FOREWORD

Perestroyka in the Soviet Union is bringing about changes that were unheard of a little over a year ago. These changes are not only affecting the Soviet Union, but all nations worldwide. But, what is perestroyka? Why is it happening? What are the barriers or problems that are occurring as a result of perestroyka? In May 1990, these questions and others were answered by distinguished guest Dr. Mirza Ismail Makhmoutov at a seminar held at the Center on Education and Training for Employment.

Dr. Makhmoutov is currently the director of the Institute for Professional Education Research in Kazan, Russia; a member of the presidium of the USSR Academy of Pedagogical Sciences; and an academician, professor, and doctor of pedagogical and philological science.

In his youth, Dr. Makhmoutov worked as a tractor driver. He served 12 years in the army, mostly as an aviation technician. He taught for 3 years at Kazan University. And, he served 18 years as the minister of education of the Tatar Republic. During this period, his scholarly interests turned toward creative thinking and the problems confronting professional education. Fifteen years ago he organized a research institute for professional instruction at the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences.

In addition to being a specialist in the fields of public education, pedagogy, and professional training, Dr. Makhmoutov has done important work in oriental philology; he uses seven languages in his research. His name is included in the Biobibliographic Dictionary of Soviet Orientalists (1972). He is co-author of an Arabic-Tatar-Russian dictionary and a Russian dictionary for non-Russian school students, and author of a Russian-Tatar dictionary for schools. He has published work on the problems of national schools and the teaching of the Russian and Tatar languages.

Dr. Makhmoutov was elected many times as a deputy to the Supreme Soviet of the Tatar Republic. For some 10 years he worked with UNESCO as a member of the International Illiteracy Committee. At present he takes an active part in the mass media discussions concerning perestroika in education and culture. He is president of the Tatar society, Watan, which promotes cultural relations with Tatars living outside the USSR.

Dr. Makhmoutov developed the problem-solving approach to instruction in the Soviet school system and has actively investigated questions of the creative abilities of children and young people. His principal works in this area are The Theory and Practice of Problem-Solving Instruction (1972), Problem-Solving Instruction (1975), and Organizing Problem-Solving Instruction in Schools (1977). Professor Isaac Lerner has written that Makhmoutov "created in his books a real encyclopedia of problem-solving instruction." His book The Modern Lesson (1981, 1985) was awarded the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences' highest award. Dr. Makhmoutov's publications total more than 450 and have been translated into English, Arabic, Spanish, Chinese, German, Bulgarian, and Finnish, as well as national languages of the Soviet Union.

At present, Dr. Makhmoutov is conducting research in general education and professional schools. His particular interest is the interrelation and integration of general and professional education and their organizational structures.

He has organized self-financing laboratories for professional training and an experimental center for continuing education. The Kazan center has provided instruction for about 6,000 people over the past 2 years and has developed new methods of fighting functional illiteracy.

Dr. Makhmoutov is currently working on ideas for a new type of professional school, giving due regard to the American community-college model. He sees this as a step in the restructuring of professional education in the USSR. Dr. Makhmoutov is presently developing plans for the implementation of community colleges in the USSR with the assistance of the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges (AACJC), The Community Colleges for International Development (CCID), Florida Community College, St. Louis (Missouri) Community College, and Waukesha (Wisconsin) Technical College, and the Center on Education and Training for Employment (CETE).

Dr. Makhmoutov's professional and organizational activities have been described by the Polish writer Jerzy Karshewsky in his book Portrait of the Active Man; in Izvestia, the UNESCO bulletin; and other journalistic pieces.

For his creative activities, Dr. Makhmoutov has received the Order of Lenin, the Order of the October Revolution, two orders of Labour (Red Banner), and many other honors. It is our privilege to bring Dr. Makhmoutov's paper to you.

Ray D. Ryan Jr.
Executive Director

PERESTROYKA IN THE SOVIET UNION

Great changes are taking place in the world. In past decades, the confrontation of our two ideologies seemed unresolvable, and it was only yesterday that the people of our two social-and-economic structures were set against each other. Today, sociopolitical and economic changes have brought a change in social consciousness and psychology. People have realized that further confrontation would very soon lead to global catastrophe and cause the death of the planet Earth. Our two leaders have stretched out their hands to each other, and our people have breathed a sigh of relief.

However, this is only the beginning of new thinking and a new approach to the solution of other global issues, such as disarmament and real peaceful coexistence, sharp reduction of military expenditures, the struggle against hunger on a global scale, the rescue of nature and cultural values of human civilization, and the creation of improved living conditions. The solution to these problems and others is within the common power of the people; however, this requires special sociopedagogical means in molding a new kind of thinking, a moral attitude toward labor, and attention to spiritual needs and creative activity.

I am often asked why people in the Soviet Union are demanding perestroika? Hasn't socialism given them anything? It is hard to give a short answer to this question. Briefly, however, socialism has brought education to a people that before, were almost entirely illiterate. Today, more than 80 percent of our young people are high school graduates, and the country has some 60 million students in elementary and higher education. Our economy employs more than 34 million engineers and specialists who were trained in technical high schools.

Salaries in the USA are high, averaging $2,000 a month. In the USSR, the average is much lower--240 rubles a month. However, our government pays many millions in subsidies to collective farms to keep food prices low. The cost of producing a kilogram of meat is 5-6 rubles, but meat sells for 2 rubles a kilogram. Prices for bread (20 kopecks a kilogram), milk, butter, and vegetables have remained low up to the present day. The average Soviet family pays a mere 4-6 percent of its income for housing. Education at all levels is free, as is health care. Public transportation is nearly free: riding the subway, bus, or trolley costs 5 kopecks; train and air tickets are also inexpensive. There has been no unemployment since the thirties. Socialism produced all these benefits, and others. Why, then, has our society undertaken its own radical reconstruction?

Many people consider, and in our country nearly everyone is convinced, that the basis for a society's development must be only social revolutions and ideological dogma. But in reality, as is proved by analysis of the history of education and cultural development and of human civilization in general, the natural basis of all changes in every society tends to be objective technological revolutions. From a psychological point of view, this is interpreted as the needs and interests of the majority of the population.

The first technological revolution was agrarian. It occurred at the dawn of mankind and resulted in man's agricultural activity. Migratory tribes subsisted by gathering and primitive hunting. Nomadic people became settled. A technological revolution meeting the needs and interests of people caused this settling. The family became the main labor call of the community, the main element responsible for the instruction and education of children and youth.

The growth of labor productivity created surplus production and caused the development of trade. People were guided by their experience and worldly wisdom. Scientific knowledge was in its infancy and played no significant role. The education of children was based on the rules of popular pedagogy.

The second technological revolution was industrial, which occurred no more than 200 years ago. Its development on the planet was uneven. One group of people was nomadic, whereas others had just begun the transition to agriculture. Still others had begun the creation of a new life.

If the agrarian revolution settled nomads on the lands, the industrial revolution isolated man from the land and created the new activity of industrial production that led to urbanization. Most important, the industrial revolution resulted in collective labor with a search for a new means of production and new conditions for intellectual development, which resulted in an uprising of culture in general.

General and scientific knowledge began to play a significant role in the material well being of mankind and a generally higher level of culture. Education became not only the means for raising the general culture of various strata of the population and the professional level of individuals, but also a means of vocational training. Technical progress released man from hard manual labor. As an example, centuries ago, 99 percent of production was done by man's and animal's muscular efforts; by the end of the 19th century, it was only 1 percent, and the rest was done by machines. General education resulted from the technological and social revolutions, and it became a vital need of an industrial society.

The third technological revolution, the scientific and technological revolution burst into the world as a result of a number of discoveries and achievements in the technology of production. It began in the middle of the 20th century, mostly in highly developed industrial countries, and greatly accelerated the process of labor and intellectualization.

Microelectronics, chemistry, new materials, genetic engineering, biotechnology, nuclear energy, and lasers revolutionized production. Now production is performed not with the help of machines, as in the case of industrial production, but by machines run by man.

Labor and its intellectualization created a new type of activity—information technology. But again, this took place mostly in highly developed capitalist countries. The conveyor belt and complex mechanization can be seen as the prime creation of the industrial revolution. The scientific and technological revolution resulted in automation and robotizations of production processes, which led to the appearance of mass production and saturation of the world market and an emphasis on the quality of goods over their quantity.

The key element in information technology has, for the time being, left the socialist countries. Even industrially developed East European countries went forward mainly by industrial development, utilizing just a few elements of the scientific and technological revolution. The evidence of this is the great lag in cybernetics and electronics, computerization of industrial processes, and the production of high-quality goods that are in popular demand.

The third technological revolution raised the standard of living in many industrially developed countries. It made significant new demands on man in the areas of professional training, general education, and morality. The importance of scientific knowledge and creative abilities became apparent. A vital new science caused a higher level of general secondary education that became standard for most industrially developed countries. The USA, for example, has the world's largest number of students in higher education. They provide workers a 12-year course of general education. The course of training in a number of professions amounts to 5 or more additional years. A system of lifelong, postgraduate education is also available.

Another example, Japan provides 95 percent of the younger generation a 12-year course of full-time general education. Nearly 40 percent of Japan's youth enter the universities. The country has reached unprecedented industrial and cultural development because of the intellectual potential of the nation and centuries of moral and esthetic education.

Japan has little wealth and yet has become a highly developed country. Suffice it to say, Japan has produced more than 130 million tons of steel annually, without having a single ton of iron ore as a natural resource. Because of the high level of labor organization, Japan was the first country to develop a network of fully automated production plants.

The scientific and technological revolution of the population involved in production requires not only high-level knowledge and competence, but the ability for creative, innovative thinking and independent decision making.

Man's behavior and consciousness are regulated in general by his interests and needs. "If geometric axioms were in contradiction with man's interests, they would be reviewed." This witty quotation reflects an objective phenomenon. Interests and needs are initiated by man's intellectual curiosity and progress in accordance with living conditions. This is a well-known formula. Marx, as an expert in philosophy and political economics, expressed it in a brief phrase, "Life's necessities get developed in the process of consumption." Equally important are man's material and spiritual needs. These briefly are the objective bases of perestroyka in the economy and education system of our country.

What are the main trends of the process of perestroyka in Soviet society? First, policy is always connected with a question of power. What was the State power in our country before perestroyka, and why was our society dissatisfied with it? Formally, the power in our country was held by the Soviets, a government body selected by the people. As is usual in all civilized countries under the principles of democracy, this power was divided into the legislative, executive, and judicial powers.

However, only the executive power was really functional; it acted not to observe the law, but to follow the resolutions and decrees of the party committees that were above the executive power.

The first principal resolution was made by Politburo of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). The main resolutions were approved every 4-5 years by Party Congress. The resolutions were seldom based on civilized principles and neglected the objective laws of development. The subjective point of view of incompetent leaders prevailed very often in the name of the general secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU.

Based on these decrees, the Council of Ministers adopted and approved 5-year plans for the development of the national economy, for example, what must be constructed; how many plants, bridges, cities, dwellings, etc., should be constructed; how much money should be

released. All this was in resolutions. Further, there were arrangements to implement the plans; priority was given to the quantity of production to the detriment of quality and the needs of society, and to man in the long run. The people's interests were second; the State's and party's interests were first.

For example, our industry produced more than 350,000 tractors per year, several times the USA's output. The quality of these machines, however, was so low that we still buy grain from the USA and Canada. As for another example, our country manufactures much more butter than the USA; but our system of storage, transportation, and distribution is such that in most of our cities butter is rationed.

The system of power in the country is arranged in such a way that the function of the people's power is only executive. There is no democracy in the governing. From Moscow to the smallest rural district, all decisions are made by the leaders of Party committees. The Secretary of the District Party Committee personally deals with all problems of district life from his own point of view. For instance, he can direct the judge to imprison a person or to compel the public prosecutor to dismiss a guilty person. He can do everything because all the power is in the hands of Party machinery.

This is the ruling system that our society wants to give up and, in fact, has already begun to reject. But this is a very complex problem. First, the Party apparatus is well off and doesn't want to give power to Soviet bodies. It is very hard to overcome this barrier, even for the General Secretary of the CPSU whose word is law for every party functionary. Second, people in our country do not have experience in democratic governing. That's why we are greatly interested in foreign experiences, especially in the USA where the democratic form of government has existed for 200 years.

The process of the Soviets coming to power and taking the power from the Party committees is based on deputy elections by secret general ballot. The process of adoption by a new parliament and the people's deputies of new laws based on democracy is the arena of struggle between conservative and progressive forces in our society. The struggle is on the brink of a peaceful solution to the problems and civil outbursts that we can observe in different regions of our country.

The majority of the people are convinced that perestroyka in politics and in state governing will be a success. However, this success depends on the economy. thus, the second aspect of perestroyka is our economy and financing. How as it structured previously and how does it run today?

First, all property in the country, all material and natural resources and the land, is in the hands of the State, but it is controlled by the Party and its committees. A man is the owner of his personal belongings and his salary only. As our philosophers say, the man of labor who is alienated from the means of production and from the results of his labor owns nothing. As a result he is not interested in fair and hard labor, in raising it's quality, and consequently, in the quality of his professional knowledge. The State, governed not on the basis of laws, but on the basis of Party committee decisions, is socialized capitalism; workers are hired laborers.

All production centers are in the hands of central ministries. Their main task, at any price, is to fulfill the plan, even if the results are damaging to nature and man. Ministries determine the volume of financing for our production centers according to a plan. They release material and other resources and point out where to distribute the output of production. They assign the scale of salaries, distribute machinery and equipment, and capture up-to-80 percent of the profit.

Local authorities receive only 3-4 percent profit assignments from industrial enterprises. That's why we don't have enough schools, hospitals, or dwellings, and our social services and roads are in such poor conditions.

Today our society rebels against such an economic system and demands its reconstruction. However, this process is more complex than reconstruction of power and political affairs. What prevents reconstruction of the national economy? The transition to market relations is hampered by the monopoly of our central ministries, strict centralization in national economy management and its branches, and the lack of production material and equipment for free trading at the market. Limited resources and the lack of self-management also hamper the transition to market relations.

Why is the struggle going on? What laws have been enacted? There are new laws on property, land, rent, fiscal matters, and other issues. The struggle is for independence of enterprise and for the transition of property, specifically production to be placed in the hands of labor collectives. The transition has begun in the form of rent, contracts, co-operatives, and joint-stock societies. In the USA, the people who participate in these ventures are called shareholders. In the USSR, conservative forces don't like to recognize private property as a means of production, but democratic forces wish to advance business ownership activity.

The struggle is also for a sharp increase of profit assignments from production centers to the budget of local authorities that would benefit a region. This practice has become a complex problem aggravated not only by existing party power, but also by bureaucratic machinery of central ministries. Recommendations have been made to abolish the ministerial monopolies, decentralize the economy management, and grant independence to enterprises.

Economic reconstruction is complicated further by a financial system in disarray caused by the partial transition to market relations, co-operatives functioning, etc. The rate of growth in salary much higher than labor productivity. The cost of manufactured goods is rising very rapidly. The societies tend to be divided into property layers, and the number of individuals who have money is increasing. Goods, especially those of high quality, are in critical supply. Prices are climbing, but the purchasing capacity of the general population is going down.

As for material resources, raw materials, and equipment, these items were supplied to enterprises in a strictly limited form that caused managers to increase their stock for emergencies. The value of this excessive inventory is worth more than 440 billion rubles. Additionally, many billions are "buried into the ground"; for example, there are more than 100,000 laid-up construction sites in the country. What other state system could suffer such useless waste of national wealth?

There are more than 40 million people with a low standard of life in the country. In order to preserve the low prices for food stuffs, the government releases many billions of state subsidies to the collective farms for their products, which are sold then at low prices.

The government has undertaken measures against monetary inflation by trying to find goods for export trade on converted currency in order to assist the industries in introducing new and advanced technology. This source would be used to modernize equipment with which to upgrade the quality and quantity of production. However, the low quality of goods prevents them from being exported, and raw materials can't provide a sufficient amount of currency.

The reconstruction of both political and economical systems in the country is going on under the searchlight of "glasnost" (that means openness for the public) and is controlled today by public opinion. The public, however, has no experience in this type of openness.

In 1917, our country for the first time in its history, without any prior experience and the lack of knowledge in economics or social psychology, made a transition from capitalism to socialism. Because of the lack of social experience and knowledge, there were a lot of mistakes made, though some targets of that revolution were reached. To a certain level, the well-being of the population and its culture was improved. But the dogmatic system hampered the intellectual development of the nation and, in my opinion, has caused stagnation in politics, ideology, economy, and culture. Today we have started the transition from totalitarian socialism to democratic socialism. And, again, we are doing this for the first time and, again, without theory. Naturally, there will be many mistakes.

Is there any reconstruction of the ideology by itself in the Communist Party? In a way, yes; such reconstruction is hinted. First, there is the analysis of the philosophy itself. Time breaks down the former dogma, and there are efforts to find mistakes in Marx's and Lenin's theory of building communism. The supporters of creative analysis suggest determinations of the positive and negative elements of this theory and, accordingly, the rejection of building up communism in the visible future. We mean building up, not in a dictatorial Stanlinist socialistic sense, but socialism based on democracy, the objective laws of social development, development of economy, and free democratic interrelations.

Ideology, being previously irreconcilable to others, is now, as a consequence, shifting its platform. There is a green light for a multi-party system and recognition of religion, including the removal of all bans for religious outlook and activity.

The third item in reconstruction of ideology is characterized and aimed at a transition from purely a class values orientation to values common to all mankind. If the defense of social justice of working people was not noted earlier by the State and Communist Party, priority today is given to morals common to all mankind.

With this problem we also have a lot of difficulties: first with conservative, dogmatic thinking and, second, with the lack of new philosophy, new theory in building up socialism, new ideological principles, and theoretical propositions. Reconstruction in ideology, seemingly, will take more than reconstruction in economy. We are inspired with the changes and look to the future optimistically. Public consciousness has awakened in its political maturity, and great activity in the struggle for perestroyka is gaining speed. World public opinion and the government of democratic states support the idea of perestroyka and even give us a hand. We consider all this to be a certain pledge of successful democratic reform in our country.

Some people criticize our State, affirming that it has given nothing to the people. In a way, yes. I'm sure we've gone to extremes. In 1917, the population of Russia was 80 percent rural with consumption of minimal industrial goods. The majority of peasants were poor, nearly all illiterate. The urban population of Russia consisted of blue-collar and white-collar workers and merchants. The workers lived in poverty--worse than now, otherwise they would not have fought for Soviet power. During the period of Soviet power, we have created a great industry; but the trouble is that the major part of industry is defense industry. The arms race has led us to the verge of ruin. If we succeed in conversion and transition to market relations, then things will improve. True, our market is empty today and not expected to be filled soon; but I think that capitalist countries will fill it as soon as the ruble becomes a convertible currency.

What are the main trends of reforms in education? The great drawback of general education has been the sole type of education provided. All institutions were 10-year secondary schools with programs and curricula common to all regions and republics, constructed with no consideration to national, historical, and regional peculiarities. There has been, as well, strict centralization of school management and finance and idealogization of pedagogical and education on the whole.

What's going on with general schools now? There is decentralization of management and differentiation of education. That means classes in the humanities and multivariant curricula for the natural-and-math types. There is a selection of subjects for free choice as well as subjects for extended and close study. New programs are also being developed.

Democratic reforms in school management are taking place--election of school managers, parental participation in pedagogical councils, and so forth. There is also revocation of obligatory instruction in senior classes of secondary school.

Previously education was started at 7 years of age; now it is 6. There will be an 11-year school program instead of 10. There also is a search for different ways to improve school financing and to associate it with production centers.

The same, but also special drawbacks, characterize the vocational schools. In schools pupils were given "satisfactory marks" instead of more accurate assessments. The same is done in vocational schools in order to keep students and to fulfill the school graduation plan. In vocational training, we have only two types of educational institutions: vocational schools for training workers on the basis of 8-10 years of schooling and 4 years of specialized secondary school for training the medium-range technicians.

The system of vocational training on the whole is strictly centralized. It is directed and controlled from Moscow no matter where the institution is located. The structure of educational institutions is based on the principle of training for specific occupations and, as a rule, is strictly specialized. For example, in a small town vocational training is limited to becoming a builder, metal worker, or a service worker, thus the choice for young people is greatly limited.

New concepts in vocational training are presently being developed. They deal with new curricula and programs and differentiation of subjects regarding professions. But centralization in management, finance, and control are still there, causing the prestige of professional schools and the number of students to decline.

I consider one of the ways to reconstruct vocational training to be "de-idealogization" of education, democratic reform, and priority in financing. It is necessary today to shift organizational structures, to establish new types of educational institutions, and to elaborate and introduce new pedagogical technologies, forms, and methods of instruction. We must pay special attention to the problem of correlation and integration of general and vocational education as a condition of molding the integrity of knowledge and world outlook.

In this respect we've begun to study foreign experience. Our institute is interested in the experiences of the USA, particularly with respect to its community colleges, its pedagogics, its application of new and advanced methods, its instruction, and its computerization. The creation of technical certification and colleges based on narrow specific occupational principles has already taken place. But we have to reject this principle, because it prevents enterprise and regional independence. With the assistance of Dr. Edmund Gleazer, former president of the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, and the Community Colleges for International Development, good relations have been established. An agreement on a joint-venture research laboratory has been signed, work has begun, and the first reports on new approaches have already been made.

In September, the first Soviet-American symposium will be held in the USSR. Among the participants will be Dr. Charles Spence, President, Florida Community College at Jacksonville, Dr. Michael Crawford, Chancellor, St. Louis (Missouri) Community College, and Dr. Richard Anderson, President, Waukesha (Wisconsin) Technical College. Dr. Ray D. Ryan, Executive Director, and Dr. Chet K. Hansen, Deputy Executive Director, the Center on Education and Training for Employment at The Ohio State University, and noted scientist Dr. Leon U. Lessinger also will participate in this work.

Our task is Perestroyka in the system of professional education. I hope that the experiences of the USA in this field will help us. We have found the experiences of the community colleges of St. Louis Community College, Florida Community College, and Waukesha Technical College to be most gratifying and indeed helpful. We have truly started our cooperation with our colleagues from the USA.

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